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ABSTRACT

A sample of 1,048 seventh through twelfth grade students in Richmond, Virginia, was surveyed to determine whether they read the local morning newspaper, what features or types of news interested them, and what exposure they had to other daily newspapers and to television. Survey results are as follows: nine out of ten students were exposed to newspapers on a daily basis and 52% of the students read a morning newspaper two or more times a week, with 73% of the morning newspaper readers also reading other newspapers. Newspaper reading exposure varied little across grade levels, but television viewing was noticeably less for students in higher grades. Most students (70%) turned to a specific page to begin reading the newspaper, with boys turning first to the sports section and girls turning to the comics or entertainment pages. Boys' reading interests were, in rank order, sports, movies, local news, and other entertainment, while girls' reading interests were movies, news about people, entertainment other than movies, and fashion news. The median time spent reading a newspaper was 21 minutes. The most important predictor of newspaper reading among the students was the availability of newspapers in the home, suggesting the importance of newspaper home delivery sales. (RI)

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ANPA NEWS RESEARCH REPORT

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Newspaper Readership Among Public School Children Grades 7-12

By John B. Mauro

HIGHLIGHTS: Nine out of 10 students either read or are exposed to a daily newspaper on a regular basis. There is little difference in newspaper reading exposure among various grade levels. However, as students pass on to higher grade levels, there is a noticeable drop in television viewing according to a survey conducted among 7th-12th graders in the Richmond, Virginia, area public schools. The most important predictor of newspaper reading among students is the availability of newspapers in the home.

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John B. Mauro is director of research for Media General, Inc. and a member of the ANPA News Research Committee.

This study of newspaper use in the home by junior and senior high students found:

- Fifty-two percent of the students read a Richmond morning newspaper two or more times per week—slightly more boys (58%) than girls (52%)—and these ratios seem to hold among all sixth grade levels.
- Seventy-three percent of those who read the morning newspaper say they also read at least another daily newspaper—notably, Richmond's evening newspaper.
- Median time spent reading the morning newspaper—21 minutes.
- Seventy percent of the students start reading the morning newspaper by first turning to a specific page or section. Boys opt for the sports section (71%). Girls prefer to go to comics (44%) and entertainment pages (19%).
- Best read comics among boys and girls were Dennis the Menace, Blondie, Marmaduke and Beetle Bailey. Similar preferences occurred with each grade.
- News or features that interest boys are, in rank order, sports, movies, local news and other entertainment. News and features that interest girls are movies,

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news about people, entertainment, other than movies, and fashion news.

• Exposure to daily newspapers has little bearing on television viewing.

• Age or grade level seems to be more of a factor for television viewing than for newspaper reading. As students get older more of them spend less time and watch television less frequently but they are more inclined to watch the more serious programs such as news and documentaries.

• One in five students who say they receive no daily newspaper in the home nevertheless say they get local and national and international news from newspapers—nine out of 10 from television, and eight out of 10 from radio.

• Nearly half (43%) of the non-reader students rely upon newspapers nonetheless for "sales bargains of things you wear or use."

Purpose and Methodology

Purpose of the survey was to determine the proportion of public school students, seventh to twelfth grades, who regularly read (two or more times per week) the Times-Dispatch, Richmond's morning newspaper. It sought to determine what features or types of news interested them, and what exposure they had to other daily newspapers and to television. Among non-readers of the Times-Dispatch, the survey sought to determine how various information was received, exposure to television and other newspapers.

Respondents included a sample of 1,048 students randomly selected by class. Each student completed a self-administered questionnaire in class under the supervision of his or her homeroom teacher. Those students who said they read the morning Times-Dispatch were asked to complete one questionnaire while the others were asked to complete another. Both groups were given the same television questions. Questionnaires were completed in early February 1978.

The sampling method provided representation of all public schools and all classes, 7th to 12 grades, in the three school districts of the Times-Dispatch principal home delivery area. In this area—Richmond City, Chesterfield and Henrico counties—circulation per 100 households for the Times-Dispatch is 44; evening News Leader is 51; estimated net combined weekday is 72; Sunday is 72.

Ninety-five percent of those sampled responded to the questionnaires. Of the 1,048 who responded, 547 said they were morning newspaper readers, 501 said they were not—of all, 47 percent were boys, 52 percent were girls, 1 percent didn't say. The sampling procedure insured similar representation within each grade level.

Exposure to Daily Newspaper

Nine out of 10 students are exposed to one or more newspapers regularly. One-half read the morning newspaper at least twice per week. Although some differences are observed in amount of exposure among grade levels, there appears to be no increase in newspaper exposure or readership as grade levels go up. Seventh graders are as frequent readers as twelfth graders. (See Table 1)

Table 1

Daily Newspaper Readership and Exposure

Grade	General Age Range	Read Times-Dispatch	Receive Only News Leader or Other Dailies	Do Not Read Times-Daily, Do Not Receive Any Newspapers	Number Interviews = 100%
7th	12-13	56%	34%	10%	182
8	13-14	45	43	12	197
9	14-15	55	29	16	157
10	15-16	53	38	9	161
11	16-17	48	34	18	178
12	17-18	57	35	8	173
All Grades		52	36	12	1,048

Exposure to Television

Generally, the amount or frequency of daily newspaper reading has little bearing on television viewing. According to this survey, the heavy newspaper reading student does as much or as little television viewing as does the light or the non-newspaper reader. Grade level (or age) does affect frequency of and amount of time spent on viewing. As grade levels go up, television time and frequency go down. For example, 16 percent more 7th graders watch TV every day than do all graders, while there are 13 percent fewer 12th graders (100-87) watching TV every day. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Index of Television Viewing

Grade	Watch Every Day	Watch Three or More Hours Per Day
7th	116	114
8	108	104
9	108	111
10	97	88
11	85	90
12	87	90
Average All Grades =	100	100

Types of TV Programs Usually Watched

Intensity of newspaper reading has little effect on the types of programs students usually watch. Sports is the exception. Proportionately more readers usually watch sports shows than non-readers.

Movies, by far, lead all other types of programs usually watched. Comedy shows and sports follow. There are no significant differences in level of viewing among grades. Seventh graders show more preference for game shows and cartoons than do 12th graders. Older students show greater interest in news programs and documentaries. The proportion of 7th graders usually watching documentaries is one-half that of the 12th graders. (See Tables 3 and 4)

Table 3

Types of Programs Usually Watched
(Average all types = 100)

Program Type	All Grades
Movies	170
Comedy	163
Sports	119
Game	113
Police	104
Cartoons	104
Soap Operas	78
Song and Dance	61
News	61
Documentaries	33

Table 4

Types of Programs Usually Watched

Program Type	Grades					
	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Movies	99	99	102	98	104	101
Comedy	98	102	102	103	97	98
Sports	98	105	98	103	94	97
Game	120	103	115	95	93	77
Police	120	104	114	98	88	80
Cartoons	138	116	109	93	75	70
Soap Operas	83	100	102	110	117	90
Song and Dance	112	109	103	103	85	97
News	82	82	103	91	94	142
Documentaries	100	56	72	89	94	200
Average all grades for each program type = 100						
Students interviewed =	182	197	157	161	178	173

How Non-Readers Acquire Information

Somehow a majority of students who neither read nor have newspapers in their homes manage to refer to newspapers for certain information. Radio and television hold strong leads in how students get most of the hard news—i.e., local, state, national and world news—while the spread between media is not as great for other types of news. (See Table 5)

Reasons For Not Reading Morning Newspaper

The newspaper "not brought into my home" was the reason a majority of students gave for not regularly reading the morning Times-Dispatch. Apparently students rely upon others to bring the newspaper into the home. If it is available, they are likely to read it. Only 22 percent said they had no time to read it; 10 percent said they were not interested. As students mature, however, more of them find lack of time as the reason for not reading. Seventy-four percent of the students who do not read the morning Times-Dispatch, however, receive other daily newspapers in the home—70 percent receive the evening News Leader. (See Table 6)

Student Readers of Morning Newspaper

Fifty-two percent of the students say they read the morning Times-Dispatch at least twice per week. Proportionatly more boys read (58%) than girls (47%). Readership at grade levels varies but there does not appear to be a trend in either direction. The ninth grade, however, shows proportionately more girls reading than boys.

Seven out of 10 boys or girls who read the morning Times-Dispach also read at least another daily newspaper. Girls seem to read more newspapers than boys.

Table 5

Students Who Do Not Read Times-Dispatch Or Receive Any Other Newspapers (All Grades)

Source	Usually Get Most Information About: Nation & World	Richmond & State	Sales of Things Wear or Use	Entertainment (Movies, Concerts)	Sports
Newspaper	22%	21%	43%	51%	30%
TV	92	86	63	59	83
Radio	83	74	41	64	46
Teachers	29	21	--	--	--
Friends	--	43	--	57	42
News Magazine	22	--	--	--	--
Shoppers	--	--	17	--	--
Posters	--	--	--	13	--
Scholastic Magazine	4	--	--	--	--
Other	6	--	21	3	2

Students interviewed = 126

Table 6

Reasons Why Students Do Not Read Morning Times-Dispatch

Grade	Newspaper Not Brought Into Home	No Time	Not Interested	Other Reasons	Number Interviews = 100%
7th	55%	16%	19%	10%	80
8	69	16	9	6	108
9	44	21	20	15	71
10	69	18	1	12	76
11	61	24	10	5	92
12	49	40	3	8	74
All Grades	59	22	10	9	501

Table 7

Readership of Newspapers

Grade	Read Morning Times-Dispatch		Percent of Morning Times-Dispatch Readers Who Also Read Other Daily Newspapers	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
7th	60%	53%	84%	73%
8	48	44	66	71
9	53	57	64	84
10	62	45	74	62
11	60	37	73	82
12	65	51	65	76
All Grades	58	47	71	74

Total Boys = 287 Total Girls = 258

Fifty-seven percent of both sexes read the Richmond evening newspaper, the News Leader. (See Table 7)

On the average, boys and girls who read the morning newspaper spend 21 minutes reading it. Tenth graders of both sexes spend the least amount of time (18 minutes) while the 12th graders spend slightly more time. Widest deviation occurs (6 minutes) between girls in 12th and 10 grades. (See Table 8)

Seventy percent of the boys and girls read the Richmond morning newspaper by first turning to a specific page or section. Grade levels seem to make little difference; therefore, data for grade levels is not shown. (See Table 9)

Boys turn to sports. Girls turn to comics and entertainment pages in that order. As grade levels get higher, there seems to be a greater interest in sports among girls. Interest in comics lowers as girls and boys get older. (See Table 10)

Table 8

Median Time Spent Reading Morning Newspaper

Grade	Minutes	
	Boys	Girls
7th	20	22
8	20	20
9	23	21
10	19	18
11	22	19
12	23	24
All Grades	21	21

Table 9

How Morning Newspaper Is Read
(All Grades)

	Start at Front Page, Go Straight Through	Turn to Specific Section	Some Other Way
Boys	22%	74%	4%
Girls	29	66	5
Both	25	70	5

Total Boys = 287 Total Girls = 258

Table 10

Page or Section Turned to First
(Among Those Who First Turn to Section)

Grade	Sports		Comics		Entertainment		Other	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
7th	55%	6%	28%	58%	3%	12%	14%	24%
8	63	12	14	43	6	21	17	24
9	82	10	9	56	--	24	9	10
10	75	17	11	48	--	21	14	14
11	74	24	8	19	5	19	13	38
12	75	31	19	31	3	19	3	19
All Grades	71	16	15	44	3	19	11	21

Total Boys = 212 Total Girls = 171

Although there are variations of readership of specific comics among grade levels, no discernible trend appears. All grade levels seem to follow the same general reading patterns. Girls appear more comics-oriented overall, leading the boys in percent reading in seven out of 13 comic strips, and when they lead the boys, they lead them by a much wider margin than when the boys lead them. Dennis the Menace, Blondie, Marmaduke and Beetle Bailey are clearly the leaders for both boys and girls. (See Table 11)

Among students, both boys and girls, hard news (local, state, national and international) becomes more interesting as grade levels go higher.

Movies and other entertainment hold tremendously high interest among boys and girls—particularly among girls—and at all grade levels.

Sports news has very high interest among boys and substantial interest among girls. And as girls get older, more of them find sports news interesting.

Table 11

Comics Read Regularly
(Percent of Those Reading Morning Times-Dispatch)
(All Grades)

	Boys & Girls	Boys	Girls
Dennis the Menace	72%	67%	79%
Blondie	71	65	79
Marmaduke	64	62	66
Beetle Bailey	62	63	61
Snuffy Smith	45	43	47
Funky Winkerbean	41	42	40
Nancy	39	33	45
Andy Capp	32	31	33
Mark Trail	27	29	24
Dr. Smock	26	27	26
Gil Thorp	19	20	17
Judge Parker	15	8	22
Best Seller Showcase	12	14	10
Students interviewed =	547	287	258

Table 12

Kinds of News and Features of Interest
To Students Who Read Morning Newspaper

	Boys						
	All Grades	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Sports	85%	88%	89%	90%	87%	77%	83%
Movies	82	80	93	83	83	83	73
Local News	69	63	73	74	59	75	71
Entertainment Other Than Movies	55	49	64	55	50	58	54
State News	45	39	55	38	35	54	50
News About People	44	45	45	26	37	52	52
Music	37	24	25	36	43	50	44
National, International News	33	25	23	36	33	35	48
News About Things to Buy	22	29	18	26	17	23	19
Editorials	18	25	16	10	7	19	31
How-To-Do-It Features	17	25	18	14	13	17	6
Fashion News	8	10	5	14	9	10	2
Other Topics	17	22	18	12	17	13	17
Students interviewed =	287	51	44	42	46	52	52
	Girls						
	All Grades	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Movies	96%	96%	98%	100%	95%	100%	87%
News About People	72	61	64	65	79	88	83
Entertainment Other Than Movies	69	57	67	72	77	71	72
Fashion News	64	59	56	67	67	71	70
Sports	60	53	58	70	67	65	54
Local News	60	49	60	47	59	76	72
Music	58	47	47	63	59	82	59
News About Things to Buy	49	55	40	44	41	56	59
State News	40	31	36	40	33	47	54
National, International News	24	6	27	19	21	29	43
How-To-Do-It Features	21	25	18	28	15	18	20
Editorials	17	12	13	21	15	18	22
Other Topics	24	25	33	23	21	18	20
Students interviewed =	258	51	45	43	39	34	46

News about people generates more interest as boys and girls get older. Girls have substantially more interest about people than boys do.

Fashion news ranks high with girls across all grade levels and as girls mature their interest becomes even stronger.

Girls seem to have a greater diversification of interest in newspaper topics than boys.

As boys and girls mature, their interest in news and features of music increases. As we might expect, more girls than boys have interest in this subject.

Although there seems to be no noticeable correlation between age and readership of items about things to buy, girls are substantially more interested in this subject than boys.

Boys, however, are more interested in hard news than girls. How-to-do-it features interest more 7th grade boys than 12th grade boys. This is not as apparent among girls. (See Table 12)

Thirty percent of the boys indicated a dislike for fashion news while 19 percent of the girls indicated a similar dislike for editorials.

Girls seem to spread their dislikes over more types of news and features than boys. This seems to bear out the notion seen earlier that girls are more diversified in their newspaper reading preferences. (See Table 13)

Table 13

Kinds of News and Features Liked Least
(All Grades)

	Boys	Girls
None	36%	29%
Local News	1	2
State News	2	5
National, International News	6	16
Sports	1	10
News About People	2	2
News About Things to Buy	2	3
Fashion News	30	3
How-To-Do-It Features	6	8
Music	4	--
Movies	--	2
Entertainment Other Than Movies	--	--
Editorials	9	19
Students interviewed =	287	258

Conclusions

Although the newspaper reading habits of Richmond area public school children may not represent those of school children eleswhere, certain characteristics are worth noting. Unlike adults who primarily prefer to read a newspaper from beginning to end, children select the place in the newspaper which carries the information of greatest interest. Children are not likely to use their money to buy daily newspapers. Instead, they rely upon adults to provide them with the opportunity to read. Once this happens, children rely upon newspapers as most adults do. To create future adult readers, therefore, it is important for newspapers to continue to put even greater emphasis on home delivery sales—to have the newspaper available in the home for children to see and read. ■